

Strength Through Diversity

Strategic Goal #4



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"We have become not a melting pot, but a beautiful mosaic—different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams," said former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

In today's expeditionary world, this diversity expands understanding, enables the Air Force to adapt and overcome an ever-changing enemy, and is the source of one of America's greatest strengths.

Strategic Goal #4 is centered on enhancing the diversity of the faculty, staff and cadet wing with the intent of broadening the cadet learning environment and preparing Academy graduates to lead in a global expeditionary Air Force.

"When cadets graduate, they will enter an Air Force that is diverse and expected to become more diverse," said Dean of the Faculty Brig. Gen. Dana Born. "They will have to work with and lead people from a variety of backgrounds, and they need to learn to do that while they are here. They need to learn to leverage the strengths of individuals different from themselves."

Too often, diversity is simplified to gender, race and ethnicity. However, the Air Force broadly defines diversity

as "a composite of individual characteristics, experiences and abilities consistent with the Air Force Core Values and the Air Force Mission. It includes, but is not limited to, personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity and gender."

In the Air Force Diversity Statement published in March, then Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne wrote, "At its core, such diversity provides our force an aggregation of strengths, perspectives, and capabilities that transcends individual contributions. Air Force people who work in a diverse environment learn to maximize individual strengths and to combine individual abilities and perspectives for the good of the mission. Personal experience within such a diverse force is an important component of Air Force leadership development."

The value gained through diversity is recognized across all mission elements. The collective experience, academic research and experiences of other universities confirm that education of the highest quality at the university level can be best achieved in an academic environment that challenges young people by exposing them to a broad range of ideas and experiences.

The academic environment here is expanded to include the entire cadet experience and provides cadets the chance to live with people of dissimilar backgrounds and, in doing so, allows them to examine their personal assumptions and philosophies in contrast to others.

"The opportunities to learn are best realized when the cadet wing is widely diverse," said Maj. Tina Erzen, re-

gional diversity director. "Cadets from diverse backgrounds bring different strengths, views and ideas to the team. When they learn how to bring these contributions together, they achieve greater mission effectiveness. This, in turn, produces officers who are better prepared to lead in today's and tomorrow's global environment."

To create this environment, the Academy actively identifies and recruits potential students who, through the collective impact of their individual diversity, will provide such an environment, because it is as important for leadership training as it is for helping stimulate academic excellence. Additionally, the combined effect supports attainment of multiple Academy Outcomes through direct development of requisite responsibilities, skills and knowledge.

"Part of our mission is to expose a diverse high school population to the opportunities available here," said Academy Director of Admissions Col. Chevy Cleaves. "We have a Diversity Division that leverages the Academy diversity definition to interest those communities across the country and informs students how they can compete for an appointment."

In addition to serving in and later leading a diverse Air Force, cadets must be prepared to serve well in an increasingly complex global environment.

"Cadets will encounter cultures that differ significantly from ours here in America, and in many cases, these diverse cultures and perspectives will reflect the variety that is representative of our worldwide coalition of partners," said Colonel Cleaves.

Learning to understand both friendly and enemy forces is vitally important to all members of the Air Force. "To most effectively defend the nation, we must each be committed to an environment of mutual respect that allows every member of the Air Force team to achieve his or her greatest potential," reads the Air Force Diversity Statement.